

Issue 4: November 2006

IFEX Advocacy Action News

A bulletin for IFEX members to promote campaigns and share advocacy information

IN THIS ISSUE:

IFEX CAMPAIGNS AND ADVOCACY SUPPORT PROGRAMME page 1-2

Member Advocacy Highlights:

- WiPC Defamation Campaign
- Gambian Journalists to Develop Campaign Plans
- IFJ Support to Journalist Advocacy in Africa

'ROAR' Rapid and Organised Action Response

- Sign on to Joint Actions! page 2
- Philippines: CMFR/SEAPA Joint Statement on Class Action for Libel Cases
- Russia: CJES Joint Action on Anna Politkovskaya
- Colombia: FLIP/IPYS Joint Action

MEMBER ADVOCACY FOCUS page 3

- Advancing Press Freedom in Central Asia:
IFEX, Adil Soz and Regional Partners Collaborate

TOPICS AND TOOLS page 4

- Guardian/Observer Press Freedom Campaign
- East Africa Journalists Conference Resolution
- Websites, Human Rights Tools, and More!

IFEX CAMPAIGNS and ADVOCACY SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Member Advocacy Highlights:

WiPC Defamation Campaign

The Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) of International PEN sent out a press release on 15 November 2006 about a campaign defending writers and journalists imprisoned or facing jail sentences for "defamation" or "insult". For further information or a copy of the release, contact Sara Whyatt, Programme Director, at sara.whyatt@internationalpen.org.uk or see <http://www.internationalpen.org.uk>

Gambian Journalists to Develop Campaign Plans

A meeting of the Network of African Free Expression Organisations (NAFEO) and affiliates will be taking place on 4-5 December 2006 in Senegal, where strategies for campaigning in the Gambia will be a major focus. IFEX is supporting the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) and affiliates around the development of advocacy efforts in the Gambia.

IFJ Support to Journalist Advocacy in Africa

IFJ Africa has released a report on the proceedings from the African Affiliates Conference which took place in Rabat, Morocco this past September, called "A Vision for African Journalists: Internal Reflection External Responses": http://www.ifjafrique.org/anglais/doc/rapport_en.pdf

RAPID AND ORGANISED ACTION RESPONSES (ROAR)

Rapid and Organised Action Responses (ROAR) are part of the IFEX Campaigns Programme strategy to support rapid, short-term follow-up actions to free expression violations. Write to Sheila at (gruner@ifex.org) if your organisation would like more information.

WATCH FOR JOINT ACTION LETTERS – YOUR SIGNATURE IS NEEDED!!

Joint actions that need IFEX member support NOW:

Philippines: The Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA) and the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) request that IFEX members sign an internal appeal in support of 43 journalists who face libel charges. Please send your signatures to Chuah Siew Eng at: seapa@seapabkk.org by 8 December 2006. For a copy of the internal appeal letter see: http://www.ifex.org/download/en/CMFR_SEAPA_Nov06.doc

Russia: The Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations (CJES) gathered 12 IFEX member signatures in its recent joint action campaign to call for justice in the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya.

Colombia: Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (Foundation for Press Freedom, FLIP) gathered 15 IFEX member signatures, as well as over 50 individual signatures, during a public awareness and letter writing campaign in early November 2006. Momentum continues to increase for advocacy efforts in Colombia, given the ongoing pressures journalists face in the country – especially threats by illegal paramilitary groups.

MEMBER ADVOCACY FOCUS

Adil Soz Advances Advocacy Dialogues, Building Strong Regional Links for Free Expression

Rinata Alibekova was recently hired as the IFEX Central Asia Project Coordinator and is based at the office of IFEX member Adil Soz, in Kazakhstan. In her role, Rinata is seeking to initiate new advocacy efforts while supporting ongoing activities across the region with organisations in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, working together to advocate for freedom of expression in Central Asia.

By Rinata Alibekova, IFEX Project Coordinator for Central Asia and staff member of Adil Soz International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech in Kazakhstan

International observers have noted their concern about the freedom of expression situation in Central Asia, where rights to press freedom and free speech are often systemically denied. Adil Soz, the International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech in Kazakhstan, and its partners in three other Central Asian countries - Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan - have united their efforts to put an end to freedom of expression violations and to lobby for improvements in media legislation in their home countries.

Past and current campaigns:

Since the end of 2004, Adil Soz and other Kazakh media advocacy NGOs have been working on advancing an alternative to the current media law, considered by many international and local human rights organisations to be one that severely restricts media freedom and allows for exorbitant damages to be awarded against media outlets.

“Analysis of the situation shows that we have to cope with the most rigid media legislation in the CIS. Most of the provisions in the media law contradict international documents that were ratified by Kazakhstan, as well as the country’s Constitution. These provisions include: six articles of the

Criminal Code that allow for the imprisonment of journalists; 11 articles in the Administrative Code that allow for media outlets to be shut down; and various Civil Code provisions that make it possible to bankrupt media outlets and journalists. These are legal norms that are irrelevant for any democratic state," says Adil Soz President Tamara Kaleyeva.

According to Adil Soz, the biggest barrier to media liberalisation in Kazakhstan is legal reform. "During this year alone, the government has made changes to the media law three times: twice in January and most recently in June. All these changes restrict freedom of speech," says Kaleyeva.

During this period, when various changes were proposed to the country's media laws, Adil Soz was actively engaged in a Parliamentary working group, lobbying for better media legislation. This included proposing an alternative - and more liberal - draft law, which was submitted to Parliament on 8 November 2006, on behalf of the local NGOs on the working group.

"The principal value of the draft was that its adoption would halt the government's tendency for restricting the media through law, which in our view obviously contradicts the constitutional principle of freedom of expression," continues Kaleyeva.

The draft media law was submitted twice to Parliament. It was rejected in June 2006 when President Nazarbayev instead signed a different bill proposed by the Kazakhstan Information Ministry, despite heavy criticism by many local and international human rights organizations.

The "Law On Amendments to Some Legislative Acts on Matters Related to Mass Media" bans any editor from opening a new media outlet if an outlet they previously worked for was shut down. It also introduces a registration tax on media outlets and imposes a compulsory re-registration process to replace an editor-in-chief or move a media outlet's office to another location. Finally, it allows for a media outlet's suspension or the cancellation of its license in the event of administrative violations.

When this bill was proposed by the government, Adil Soz launched a campaign to protest the amendments. "When the Government informed us about their latest proposals for change, we made a public announcement to the effect that these changes contradict the principles of freedom of speech, as well as the Constitution of our country. Following this public statement, we prepared an appeal by NGOs in Kazakhstan to the Parliament, asking the Parliament not to approve this law," says Kaleyeva.

On 9 June, Adil Soz and Kazakh journalists addressed the President, calling for a veto on the bill. On 24 June, Adil Soz organized a demonstration with a message: "Against the legal limitations of freedom of speech." The demonstration ended with the burning of a symbol labeled "Censorship".

Shortly after the President signed the bill, Adil Soz staff and Almaty journalists gathered to protest the decision. "We and journalists from Almaty sat on thistle seeds. Thistle is a very harmful plant, and we showed that these changes to the media law, approved by the Parliament, are as harmful as thistle for the information sector in our country. In addition to that, we announced that we would give the Minister of Information a gift: a pot full of thistle plants to show him our attitude towards the law. This campaign was reported widely in the media," says Kaleyeva.

Adil Soz' tireless efforts over the last few years, to make the media environment more free and conducive to journalists' work, have brought significant results. It is considered a very positive sign that the Parliament has now scheduled the reading of the alternative draft media law, due in part to these campaigning efforts.

Campaigning in Kyrgyzstan

In recent months, due to escalating political tensions between the opposition and authorities in Kyrgyzstan, the number of violations of journalists' rights has increased greatly. Journalists have

reported that the freedom of expression situation also continues to diminish when journalists do not have equal opportunities to work, which can only be improved by de-nationalising media outlets in the country.

Shortly after the Tulip Revolution of March 2005, journalists approved of the decision by the new President of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, to de-nationalise all state-controlled media outlets and transform the main state-run television channel "State Television" into a public broadcaster.

"We made a number of statements, supporting the decision to both de-nationalise the state-controlled media outlets and transform the state television into a public one. However, since then we continue facing obstacles that prove that the authorities are reluctant to keep their promise," says the head of the Public Association Journalists (PAJ), Marat Tokoyev.

Furthermore, in late 2005, the president issued an order, which stipulated that two national newspapers should be transformed into joint stock companies. "However, this order is not being enforced," explains Tokoyev.

Journalists in Kyrgyzstan launched a campaign in an effort to advocate for freedom of expression. They actively criticised the authorities' broken promises to de-nationalise the media by preparing publications, statements, press conferences and interviews. Members of local NGOs also took part in demonstrations outside government buildings to support freedom of expression.

"Instead of issuing a formal order to transform the state television into the public television, the authorities created a public television channel called "EITR", which is not in fact public. The authorities seem to be unwilling to loosen control over the state television, because it is a strong ideological tool that influences people," says Tokoyev.

Adil Soz' partners in Kyrgyzstan have identified through systematic monitoring that Kyrgyz journalists violate laws, and have a relatively poor understanding of their rights. Subsequently improving the situation heavily depends on the level of knowledge local journalists have of their rights and of the principles of journalism,

"Not all of them [journalists], especially those working in oblasts [regions], are aware of changes in the media legislation. The monitoring shows that not many media outlets try to follow the major principles of journalism, such as objectivity, impartiality and balanced reporting. Regional media outlets are not aware of what is happening in the "mass media life" of the country," says Tokoyev.

In order to help journalists, the PAJ plans to begin issuing a newspaper, designed for journalists, which would give them a space to share experience and knowledge, discuss problems and receive necessary information and advice on these issues. "The newspaper might be a venue to consolidate information for those who are willing to observe the principles of responsible journalism," said Tokoyev.

Adil Soz hopes that training in both human rights education and monitoring may support the development of a larger campaigns or advocacy strategy in the region. This is one area where international support can be incredibly valuable. Cooperation with IFEX gives an opportunity to convey the freedom of expression problems faced by Kazakh and Kyrgyz journalists to the international community and to influence the authorities.

The IFEX Central Asia Project Coordinator and the IFEX Campaigns Coordinator will be on mission throughout Central Asia in early December to work with Adil Soz and affiliates on developing strategies to promote free expression in the region.

Topics and Tools

Articles and Sites of Interest:

Guardian/Observer Press Freedom Campaign

The Guardian / The Observer Online launched a press freedom campaign with articles and information about press freedom issues around the world. See:

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/freepress/0,,478363,00.html>

Resolution of the Journalists' Conference of East and Horn of Africa in Entebbe, Uganda, on 27-29 November 2006

Journalists and human rights defenders from Uganda, Eritrea, Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia and Sudan including South Sudan, gathered in Entebbe, Uganda, to attend a Journalists' Conference for The East and Horn of Africa organised by the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP). The groups produced a resolution reiterating their support for fundamental principles of freedom of expression enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights, as an individual human right which ensures respect for all human rights and freedoms.

For a full version of the resolution contact Hassan Shire Sheikh, Coordinator, East and Horn of Africa Program, African Human Rights Defenders Project-Canada at hshire@yorku.ca.

Appeal for a Worldwide Reading of Anna Politkovskaya's Reports on Chechnya

The journalist and critic of Putin was assassinated on October 7, 2006. For a second time the Peter Weiss Foundation for Art and Politics, based in Berlin, makes an appeal in order to commemorate the "Anniversary of the Political Lie" on 20 March 2007. The aim of these interconnected events is to raise awareness of matters and forms of political communication. Because the lie as instrument of political formations also belongs to the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is imperative that the powers that combat it don't weaken. The anniversary of the political lie was first carried out on 20 March, 2006 with a reading of Eliot Weinberger's "What I Heard about Iraq". The text was read out at forty-seven venues worldwide, in Australia, the US, Germany, Greece, Lebanon, the UK, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxembourg, Switzerland and India. Ideas are sought for "The Second Anniversary of the Political Lie - in memoriam Anna Politkovskaya". For further information, please contact: info@peter-weiss-stiftung.de

Advocacy Tools:

The Advocacy Institute has tips on planning and implementing successful campaigns. See:

<http://www.advocacy.org/>

Protectionline.org is a one-stop website on protection to be used by all human rights defenders, and by those seeking to contribute to their protection.

<http://www.protectionline.org/spip.php?rubrique2>

Call to IFEX members:

~ **Want to start a campaign? Need advice or support?**

~ **Tell us about your organisation's campaigns and advocacy efforts**

~ **Share articles, websites and campaigns tools**

Contact Sheila Gruner, IFEX Campaigns Coordinator at gruner@ifex.org